

Approved For Release
2008/03/03 :
CIA-RDP85T00875R00170003

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CIA/DER/IM 12-56

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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

*Logistic Buildup for a Communist Offensive
in the B-3 Front in South Vietnam*

Secret

ER IM 72-56
April 1972

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
April 1972

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

LOGISTIC BUILDUP FOR A COMMUNIST OFFENSIVE
IN THE B-3 FRONT IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Introduction

1. There has been an unprecedented North Vietnamese troop and logistic buildup in the B-3 Front area of the central highlands during the current dry season in apparent preparation for expanded offensive operations. This memorandum examines Communist logistic preparations to support this buildup and makes some judgments on the role that logistics would play in enemy offensive activity during the current season.

Conclusions

2. With the launching of their annual "General Transportation Offensive" in southern Laos in early January, the Communists sharply stepped up logistic support for the growing number of NVA troops in the B-3 Front area of the central highlands of South Vietnam. By undertaking a considerable road construction effort and a restructuring of their logistic apparatus, the Communists have been able to move record quantities of supplies into (and near) the area and now have sufficient stocks in place to support sustained major offensive action in the B-3 Front area.

Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Economic Research and coordinated within CIA.

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[REDACTED]

Discussion

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[REDACTED]

New Road Construction

4. The major resupply activity directed toward the B-3 Front has been facilitated this dry season by major construction activity in the Laotian Panhandle. A new series of roads (completed in January) through the central portion of the southern Laotian Panhandle gives the Communists a second major route system along which to ship supplies deep into the Panhandle, the tri-border area, and northern Cambodia. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] While this corridor has become the main supply route into the tri-border area in recent months, a substantial volume of supplies has also continued to move south on the traditional Ho Chi Minh Trail road system to the east -- Routes 92 and 96.

5. As part of their logistic buildup within the B-3 Front area this dry season, the North Vietnamese have constructed or restored well over 100 miles of motorable road south of the tri-border area in the west-central highlands of Kontum Province, South Vietnam (see the maps). Road construction in the central highlands accelerated in December 1971, when a number of new feeder roads were built east off Route 613 toward a series of ARVN Fire Support Bases (FSB).⁽¹⁾ In February 1972, [REDACTED] detected a new road being built from Cambodian Routes 19/1944 to the South Vietnamese border and the vicinity of Route 615. By early March the road was showing signs of moderate vehicle traffic, thus giving the enemy another route on which to truck supplies into the northern B-3 Front area.

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1. Heavy B-52 bombing raids early this year on bunkered storage and troop facilities along these roads caused a number of secondary fires and explosions, indicating that significant prepositioning of ordnance by the enemy had already occurred.

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[REDACTED]

Supply Flows in Southern Laos

6. With the kickoff of the logistic offensive in January, North Vietnamese transportation units in the southern Laotian Panhandle went into high gear. By mid-January, [REDACTED] heavy truck traffic - including unusual daylight movement - along the new central corridor. [REDACTED]

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8. During February, the North Vietnamese logistic effort surged.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Although the central corridor was the prime route to the tri-border area [REDACTED] Route 92/96 from the Ban Bac/Chavane area south also was carrying heavy traffic.

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9. The heavy southward flow also was reflected on the exit routes leading into the central highlands. [REDACTED] throughput on both Routes 966 and 110D accelerated sharply. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] tons of all classes of supplies were shipped to the B-3 Front. In this connection, [REDACTED] since early February 1,500 tons of rice had been transported from B-3 Front "rear areas" to battlefield units.

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10. The North Vietnamese maintained their logistic momentum during March, [REDACTED]

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Simultaneously, on the exit routes, [] more than 150 trucks entering South Vietnam on Route 966 during March - more than trebling February levels. Similarly, on Route 110D to the B-3 Front [] truck traffic was more than 50% above February totals.

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11. Besides enhancing their resupply situation in the central highlands, the North Vietnamese have also upgraded their firepower. []

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[] indicated the deployment of additional tanks into the area, including, for the first time, the T54/55 medium tank. Tanks have been sighted (and some destroyed) not only on the routes leading to the B-3 Front but also in Kontum Province in South Vietnam. Some 20-30 tanks recently have been brought into the B-3 Front area, []

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Supply Flows in South Vietnam

12. The Communists late last year also shipped large volumes of foodstuffs from the coastal regions of GVN Military Regions (MRs) 1 and 2 to help meet the increased requirements of the enemy's augmented troop strength in the B-3 Front. [] enemy transportation elements in the Quang Da Special Zone (Quang Nam Province) were directed to transport a large volume of supplies from the lowlands to the B-3 Front. The types of supplies being transported were not revealed, but a significant portion probably consisted of foodstuffs. Additional reporting described similar food shipments by the Communists from coastal Binh Dinh Province to the B-3 Front.

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Implications of the Supply Push

13. The heavy supply flow into the B-3 Front has clearly enhanced current Communist military capabilities in the area. From October through March this dry season, an estimated 3,100 to 5,100 tons of supplies were

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moved into the B-3 Front.⁽²⁾ The flow consisted of an estimated 60% arms, ammunition, and equipment; about one-third food; and the remainder POL. The substantial buildup in manpower and the introduction of heavy weapons this dry season suggests that an ordnance requirement for major offensive action would be quite large. We estimate it to be on the order of 200 tons monthly. However, the flows of arms, ammunition, and equipment have already been so large - 1,800-2,950 tons since October -- that it is clear that existing supplies are sufficient to sustain a high level of military operations for several months and provide for some stockpiling and for cushioning the impact of losses resulting from air strikes. (The Communists might have problems, however, in the distribution of these supplies, particularly in forward areas.)

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2. Additional, possibly large, amounts of supplies have also moved to the B-3 Front on Route 19 in northeast Cambodia. This total does not include food shipments known to have moved from MRs 1 and 2 to the B-3 Front.

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